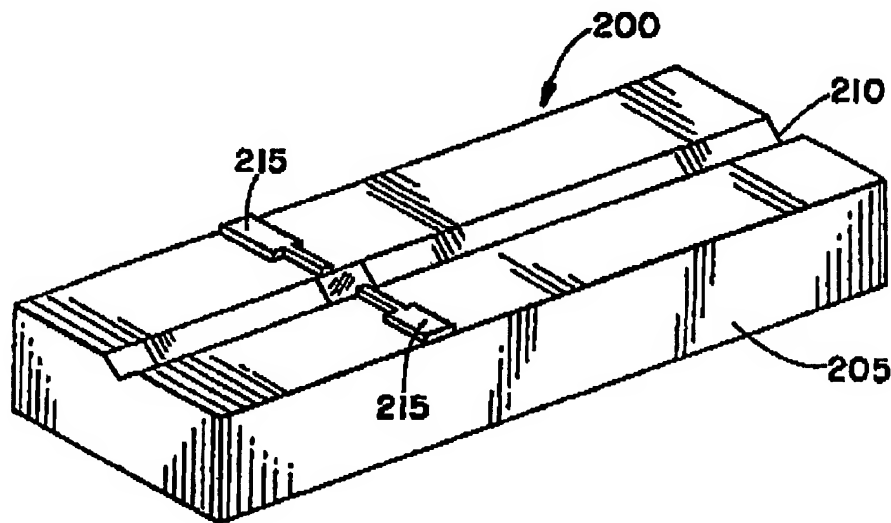


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(21) International Application Number: PCT/CA95/00474 (22) International Filing Date: 11 August 1995 (11.08.95) (30) Priority Data: 08/289,200 11 August 1994 (11.08.94) US (71) Applicant: FIBERLIGN DIVISION OF PREFORMED LINE PRODUCTS (CANADA) LTD. [CA/CA]; 24 Colonnade Road, Nepean, Ontario K2B 7J6 (CA). (72) Inventors: HARMAN, Murray, R.; 1902 Queensdale Avenue, Gloucester, Ontario K1T 1K1 (CA). MARSHALL, James, D.; 17 Randall James Drive, Stittsville, Ontario K2S 1L9 (CA). CLARK, Gordon, A.; 97 Markland Crescent, Nepean, Ontario K2G 5Z8 (CA). (74) Agent: PERRY, Stephen, J.; Sim & McBurney, Suite 701, 330 University Avenue, Toronto, Ontario M5G 1R7 (CA).	(81) Designated States: AU, BR, CA, CN, CZ, HU, JP, KP, KR, MX, PL, SI, UA, European patent (AT, BE, CH, DE, DK, ES, FR, GB, GR, IE, IT, LU, MC, NL, PT, SE). Published <i>With international search report.</i>	

(54) Title: **FUSION SPLICING BLOCK**

(57) Abstract

A consumable fusion block for fusing optical fibers includes non-conducting substrate with at least one flat surface. A pair of electrodes overlay the flat surface of the substrate and are spaced apart on either side of a passline such that each electrode tip end is adjacent the passline. A space between the electrode tips defines an arc region which can be covered to form a semi-enclosed arc region. A method is also provided for manufacturing a plurality of fusion blocks from a single slab of non-conducting material by overlying the non-conducting material with a length of conducting material, bonding the conducting material to the non-conducting material, and cutting the slab into smaller fusion blocks.

WO 96/05526

PCT/CA93/00474

FUSION SPLICING BLOCK

Field of the Invention

5 This invention relates generally to a fusion element and more particularly to a consumable block for use in splicing optical fibers.

Cross References to Related Applications

10 This application is a continuation-in-part of application serial number 08/266,205, filed June 27, 1994 entitled METHOD AND APPARATUS FOR CONTROLLING THE CONTACT OF OPTICAL FIBERS, the teachings of which are wholly incorporated herein by reference. This application is also related to co-pending application entitled TOOL FOR FUSING OPTICAL FIBERS, filed concurrently herewith in the name of the instant applicants, the teachings of which are also wholly incorporated herein by reference.

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Background of the Invention

20 Fusion splicing devices have been well known for some time and many of these devices are commercially available. One such device is described by the applicant in U. S patent 5,002,351 issued March 26, 1991 entitled Splicer for Optical Fibers. This and other similar devices are equipped with costly, permanent, tungsten electrodes capable of withstanding many repeated uses. The teachings of this patent and the following related art are incorporated herein by reference where applicable.

25 Another such device is described in U.S. patent 5,146,527 in the name of Mallinson issued September 8, 1992. Mallinson's fusion splicer is designed to receive a consumable ferrule, having a bore through a central longitudinal axis, for accommodating two fiber ends for fusion within. A slot is formed in the ferrule into which permanent electrodes are temporarily inserted for fusing optical fibers positioned within the bore. Although the devices described in both of these patents appear to adequately perform their intended function, it is an object of this invention
30 to provide a fusion block, having electrodes that are integral with the block and that are inexpensive and are designed to be used one or more times. Such a block should provide a clean fusion cavity in which fusion may take place. After fusion takes place, the block preferably remains with the spliced fused fibers.

SUBSTITUTE SHEET (RULE 10)

WO 96/05526

PCT/CA95/00474

source, a portion in of the electrodes overlying the substantially flat surface of the non-conducting substrate and spaced apart on either side of the passline such that each electrode tip end is adjacent the passline, a space between the electrode tips defining an arc region.

5 In accordance with the invention, there is further provided, a consumable fusion block comprising of a non-conducting substrate, the substrate having a two outer coated portions of conducting material for making contact with a voltage source and having two planar conducting electrodes overlaying a layer of the substrate, said
10 conducting electrodes being electrically isolated from each other and each electrode being electrically connected to one of the outer coated portions. The use of planar technology, reduces the cost of producing each fusion block.

Advantageously, providing a fusion block that has a flat non-conducting surface and overlaying an electrode layer, or alternatively a length of conducting electrode material, either by plating, printing, bonding, or casting, allows an array of
15 fusion blocks to be manufactured simultaneously, at a low cost, later to be cut into individual fusion blocks.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Exemplary embodiments of this invention will be described in conjunction
20 with the following drawings in which:

Fig. 1 is a cross sectional view of a prior art connector sleeve;

Fig. 2a is an oblique view of the preferred fusion block embodiment having electrodes overlying and being bonded to an alumina substrate;

Fig. 2b is an oblique view of a fusion block including electrodes shown in
25 dotted outline and having a layer of alumina over top of the electrodes;

Fig. 3a is an elevational view of a sheet of patterned copper for use in mass production of an array of fusion blocks;

Fig. 3b is an oblique view of a fusion block including electrodes made from the patterned copper sheet of Fig. 3a overlaying a layer of non conducting ceramic
30 material;

Fig. 4 is an oblique view shown partly in cross section and partly in dotted outline of a fusion block assembly;

WO 96/05526

PCT/CA95/00474

Fig. 5a is an oblique view of an alternative preferred embodiment of a fusion block assembly formed of two blocks of non-conducting substrate and having an electrode layer and plated barrels lining through holes that contact conducting contact pads;

5 Fig. 5b is a top view of the copper electrodes, plated barrel through holes, and copper pads shown in dotted outline of the fusion block assembly of Fig. 5a;

Fig. 5c is a top view of an array of fusion blocks prior to cutting them into individual blocks;

10 Fig. 5d is an oblique view of an alternative preferred embodiment of a fusion block assembly formed of a single block of non-conducting substrate having an electrode layer and plated barrels lining through holes that contact conducting contact pads;

Fig. 6 is an oblique view of an alternative embodiment of a fusion block having electrodes formed over a non-conducting substrate;

15 Fig. 7a is a cross sectional view of a copper electrode tip shown surrounded by epoxy sandwiched between an upper and a lower ceramic layer;

Fig. 7b is a cross sectional view of a copper electrode tip shown sandwiched between an upper and a lower ceramic layer and bonded to the lower ceramic layer, and,

20 Figs. 8a and 8b are top views of alternate electrode arrangements positioned adjacent an optical fiber passline.

Detailed Description of the Drawings

Referring to Fig. 1, a prior art connector as described in U.S. pat. No. 25 4,598,974 is shown including an annular ferrule 10 that has an interior splice chamber 12, a first bore 14 leading from the splice chamber 12 to an exterior point or face 16 of the ferrule and a second exterior point 20 of the ferrule. The connector includes a pair of diametrically opposed metal electrodes 22 and 24 that are permanently mounted in the ferrule during factory fabrication. They include inwardly extending 30 tips 26 and 28, respectively, which form an arc gap 30 within the splice chamber 12.

It has been found that inserting discrete components such as metal electrodes

WO 96/03526

PCT/CA95/00474

22 and 24 is a costly effort and therefore not a preferred method of fabrication and assembly. These small components must be handled individually and further, must be kept clean during the entire process. As well, the cylindrical shape of the ferrule does not lend itself to mass production of the arc fusion blocks having electrodes inserted therein.

Referring now to Fig. 2a, a fusion block 200 is shown comprising a nonconducting substrate of a material such as alumina. A pair of conducting electrodes 215 overlies and is preferably bonded to a flat surface of the substrate on either side of a pass line defined by a V-groove 210. The V-groove 210 serves as a guide for guiding and aligning two fibers to be fused into position. Fig. 2b is similar to that of 2a and includes a top layer of alumina 220 covering and sandwiching the electrodes. Experimental results have shown that a more controlled arc is obtained during fusion with a top layer covering the alumina 220.

By using a substrate 205 having a flat or nearly flat upper surface, strips or sheets of copper can be overlaid and bonded to one or more larger sheets of substrate material to provide an array of blocks, that can be separated into individual fusion blocks. By way of example, Fig. 3a is illustrative of a copper pattern formed from a sheet of copper 300. Similar copper patterns can be formed by chemical etching, or by die stamping. This pattern sheet 300 is bonded to a non-conducting substrate layer, and is later cut into individual fusion blocks. A dotted line 305 in Fig. 3a shows the outline of a pattern used for one fusion block shown in Fig. 3b. A trench or V-groove 310 defining a passline and a guide for the optical fibers to be fused, indicated by a dotted line in Fig. 3b, can be cut into the block to expose electrode tips 360.

Referring now to Fig. 4, an alternative fusion block is shown in two sections that during assembly are bonded together. A bottom section comprises a ceramic V-block 400 with a wide channel 410 cut through a central region for accommodating a multi layer top section 440 to be glued therein. The multi layer top section 440 is comprised of a bottom layer 442 of BeO or alumina that serves as a heat dissipation layer. A pair of electrodes 445 lie over the bottom layer and are initially deposited as a single copper strip. The copper strip is severed into the pair of electrodes 445 when the notch 460 is cut into the multi layer top section 440. After the top and bottom

WO 96/05526

PCT/CA95/00474

sections 400 and 440 are joined together, the notch 460 serves as an arc region across which a fusion arc is formed when a suitable voltage is applied across the electrodes 445. A top layer of Borosilicate glass 447 is bonded to the electrodes and to the bottom alumina layer. A transparent window may be provided for viewing the fibers to be fused together. The top layer 447 may also be a layer of alumina adjacent to the electrodes, for enhanced heat dissipation and a top layer of glass provided to retain transparency. By cutting a larger block of substrate material into an array of top sections 400 or bottom sections 440, they can be fabricated in large quantities at the same time.

Referring now to Figs. 5a and 5b, an alternate preferred embodiment is shown. For the purposes of illustration and of assembly, the fusion block is shown as an upper block 500 and a lower block 550 that are to be bonded together. Advantageously, this embodiment provides electrode contact pads 563 (one of which is shown) on an underside of the lower block 550 that have a large surface area for making electrical contact with a voltage source.

The lower base block 555, is comprised of a thick lower slab 551 of suitable non-conducting, heat dissipating material such as alumina. A planar copper layer 552 is bonded by way of being deposited or glued to the top of the lower base block 550. An upper layer of alumina 554 covers the copper layer 552 forming a copper sandwich between layers of alumina 551 and 554. An axial groove 555 is cut into the base block 550 through the copper layer 552 thereby forming two electrode tips 556 (one of which is shown). A portion of the electrode body 558 fans out and makes contact with a copper connecting track 560, however, an elongate electrode body could be used in place of the more triangular one shown. A copper plated barrel lining a through hole 561 forms an electrical path between the copper connecting track 560 and a copper contact layer that forms the contact pad 563 disposed at an end on the bottom of the base block 550. The structure is symmetrical and the other electrode (not shown) makes electrical contact via a copper plated barrel lining a through hole with a contact pad disposed at the other end of the block.

The upper block 500 is comprised of a slab or block of alumina or like material and is shown with a section cut out of a side of its mid-region. During fabrication of the fusion block, the upper block 500 is inserted and bonded into the

WO 96/05526

PCT/CA95/00474

axial groove of the lower block 550, the top portion 502 is ground off and a V-groove 504 is ground along the longitudinal axis of the upper block 500. The two portions 515 and 517 shown in dotted outline are all that remains after the top is ground off. The gap 520 between the two portions 515 and 517 forms an arc cavity.

5 Referring to Fig. 5b, a top view of the fusion block of Fig. 5a is shown. The copper on the back surface forming the contact pad 563 provides a large area for contacting with a suitable voltage supply or sound. The plated through hole 561 adjacent each end provides a conducting path from the lower contact pad 563 layer through the substrate to the electrode layer.

10 By using slabs of material that have substantially planar surfaces, arrays of blocks can be fabricated out of laminates of non-conducting substrate and conducting copper track material. Such an array is shown in Fig. 5c. From the four (4) inch by four (4) inch substrate shown, 12 x 31 fusion blocks can be fabricated by cutting the substrate accordingly, into rows and columns.

15 Fig. 5d is a diagram of a block similar to the one shown in Fig. 5a, however, the block of Fig. 5d is absent a covering surface. The block 570 also resembles the one depicted in Fig. 2a but includes plated barrels lining through holes that make contact with large conducting contact pads on the bottom of the block (not shown).

Referring now, to Fig. 6, an alternate embodiment is illustrated, comprised of
20 a slab or block of alumina 600, similar to the block 200 shown in Fig. 2a. Electrodes 645 are cut out of a sheet of copper and formed over the block. The electrodes each include a tip 656, a side portion and a contact surface 663 for contacting a voltage source. A ceramic top 665 is provided having a cavity slot and a viewing port 668. The opening defined between the electrode tips 656 can be covered by a glass cover
25 670 that fits over the ceramic top 665. In all of the embodiments heretofore described in accordance with this invention, it is preferable, but not essential, that the copper electrode layer be directly physically bonded to at least one layer of ceramic substrate material to enhance heat transfer. Referring now to Fig. 7a, a copper electrode tip 756 is shown surrounded by epoxy 758 sandwiched between an upper and a lower ceramic
30 layer 760 and 762. Although this embodiment is functional, a large amount of epoxy is burned up or otherwise destroyed when the copper electrode tip reaches a high temperature limiting the heat transfer. In the preferred embodiment of Fig. 7b, the

WO 96/05326

PCT/CA95/00474

electrode tip 756 is shown physically bonded to a lower heat dissipating layer 762 of ceramic by way of being electroplated and fired for optimum adhesion.

Turning now to Figs. 8a and 8b, two alternate electrode 856 configurations are shown. In each of these figures, the corner of the electrode serves as the electrode tip.

5 When a suitable voltage is applied, the air across the gap ionizes and an arc 858 occurs across the tips. The voltage necessary to initiate and maintain the arc, depends on the gap width among other physical factors.

Of course, numerous other embodiments may be envisaged without departing from the spirit and scope of the invention. For example, any of the embodiments shown in Figs. 4, 5, 6, and 8, could also be manufactured without a top sheet above the electrodes. As well, the blocks, shown could also be manufactured with one or more alignment grooves to accommodate a plurality of optical fibers, for example to accommodate ribbon fiber fusion applications. Although in most of the embodiments shown, the electrode cross section is rectangular, square or circular cross sections or
10 others can also be used. The fusion blocks shown in typical block shaped elements, however, within the scope of this invention the definition of a block encompasses all forms or elements having one or more substantially planar sides.

By overlaying elongate electrode material over a non-conducting substrate, a convenient, inexpensive consumable fusion block is provided.

20 The invention has been described with reference to the preferred embodiments. Obviously modifications and alterations will occur to others upon the reading and understanding of this specification. It is our intention to include all such modifications and alterations insofar as they fall within the scope of the appended claims or the equivalents thereof.

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WO 96/05526

PCT/CA95/00474

Having thus described the invention, we now claim:

1. A fusion element for fusing optical fibers resting along a passline thereon, comprising:

a non-conducting substrate; and,

5 a pair of electrodes, each electrode having an electrode tip end and having an other end for contacting a voltage source, a portion of each electrode overlying a surface of the non-conducting substrate, and spaced apart and separated from each other by the passline, such that each electrode tip end is adjacent the passline, the electrode tips defining an arc region therebetween.

10

2. The fusion element for fusing optical fibers according to claim 1, wherein the surface of the non-conducting substrate is substantially planar.

15

3. The fusion element for fusing optical fibers according to claim 2, wherein a portion of each of the pair of electrodes overlying the surface of the non-conducting substrate is bonded to the substrate.

20

4. The fusion element for fusing optical fibers according to claim 3, wherein the pair of electrodes are a one of printed, glued, and plated on the substrate.

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5. The fusion element for fusing optical fibers according to claim 3, further comprising a layer of non-conducting material substantially covering the pair of electrodes bonded to the non-conducting substrate.

30

6. The fusion element for fusing optical fibers according to claim 2, wherein the electrode tip end of each of said pair of electrodes has a smaller cross section than the other end of each said pair of electrodes for contacting the voltage source, the pair of electrode tip ends defining an arc gap for creating a plasma arc at the gap for fusing the optical fibers in the presence of a voltage across the pair of electrodes sufficient for fusion.

7. The fusion element for fusing optical fibers according to claim 2 including an

WO 96/05526

PCT/CA95/00474

electrical conducting path connecting the electrode tip end of each of said pair of electrodes with the other end of each of said pair of electrodes, said other end of each of said pair of electrodes forming an electrical contact pad.

5 8. The fusion element for fusing optical fibers according to claim 7, wherein the electrical conducting path comprises a conductive lining on the interior walls of an opening in the non-conducting substrate, the conductive lining interconnecting the electrode tip portion of each of said pair of electrodes with the contact pad via the conducting path.

10

9. The fusion element for fusing optical fibers according to claim 8 further comprising a cover for at least partially enclosing the fusion arc region.

10. The fusion element for fusing optical fibers according to claim 9, wherein the cover or enclosing the fusion arc region is transparent so that the fiber ends placed within the gap are viewable.

15

11. The fusion element for fusing optical fibers according to claim 5, wherein the substrate includes at least one groove for aligning and guiding the fibers along said passline.

20

12. A fusion element comprising a non-conducting substrate including:
at least two outer portions of conducting material for making contact with an
operatively associated external voltage source, and
25 at least two planar conducting electrodes overlaying a layer of the substrate,
said at least two planar conducting electrodes being electrically isolated from each other and each electrode being electrically connected to a one of the outer portions.

25

13. The fusion element according to claim 12 further comprising:
30 means defining through holes in the non-conducting substrate;
at least two plated conducting barrels lining the inside surface of said through
holes each plated barrel electrically interconnecting a one of the electrodes with a

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SUBSTITUTE SHEET (RULE 26)

WO 96/05526

PCT/CA95/00474

one of the outer coated portions.

14. The fusion element according to claim 13, further comprising an upper layer of non-conducting material covering the at least two planar conducting electrodes, the upper layer of non-conducting material being bonded to the non-conducting substrate.

15. A method of fabricating a consumable fusion block for use in fusion splicing of optical fibres, comprising the steps of:
providing a block of non-conducting material that has a substantially flat surface;

overlaying a conducting layer onto the substantially flat surface, said conducting layer covering at least a part of the flat surface; and,

cutting through the conducting layer to sever it into at least two portions and further cutting into the substantially flat surface to define a groove therein for receiving optical fibers to be fused.

16. The method of fabricating a fusion block according to claim 15, wherein the step of cutting into the substantially flat surface to define said groove includes cutting through the conducting layer thereby defining electrode tips at severed ends of the conducting layer on either side of the groove.

WO 96/05526

PCT/CA95/00474

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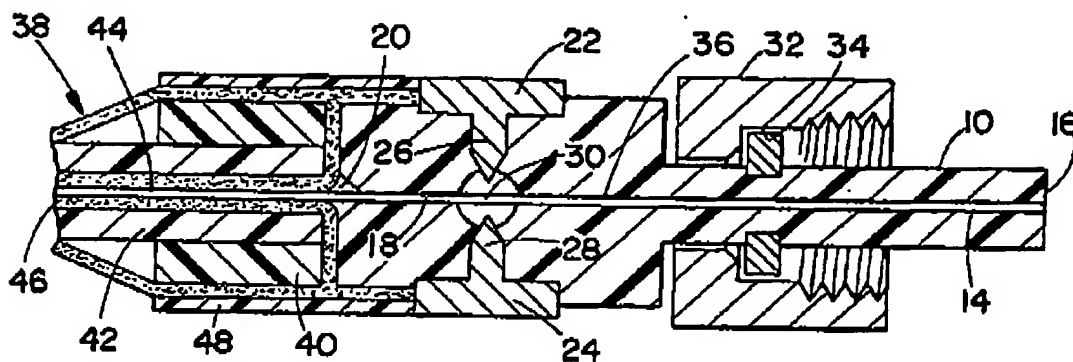


FIG. 1
(PRIOR ART)

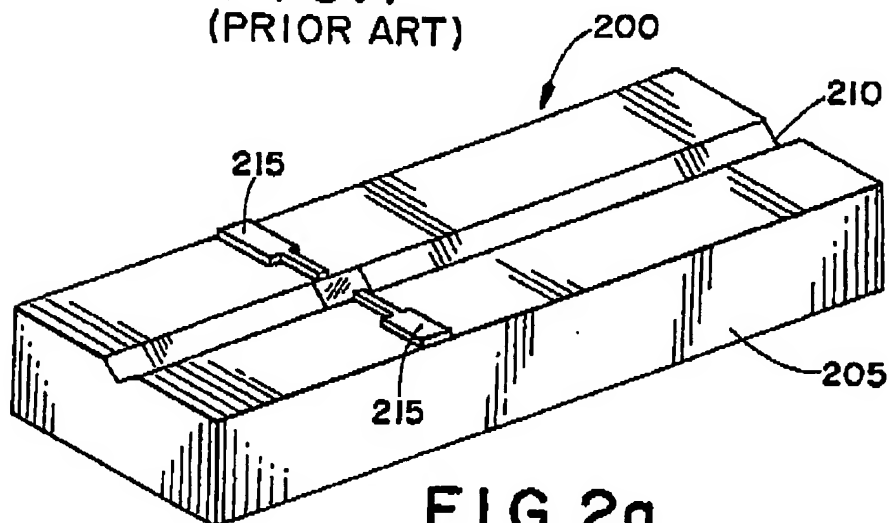


FIG. 2a

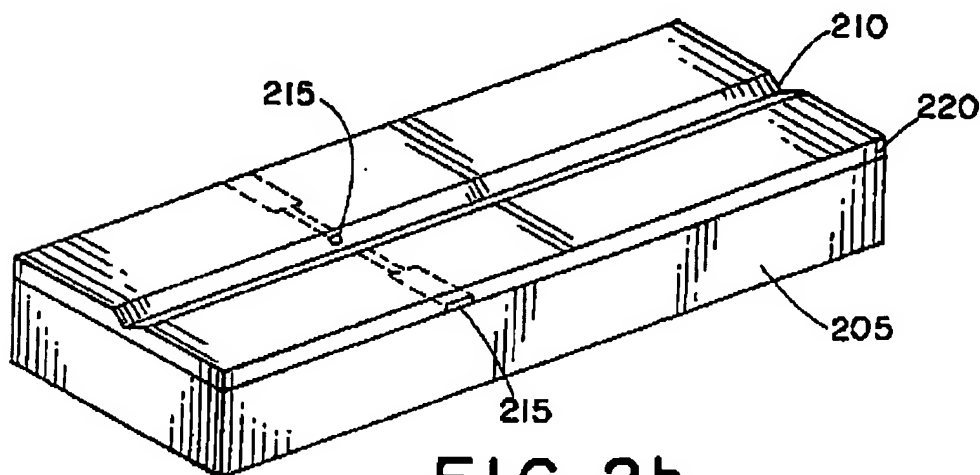


FIG. 2b

WD 96/05526

PCT/CA95/00474

2/6

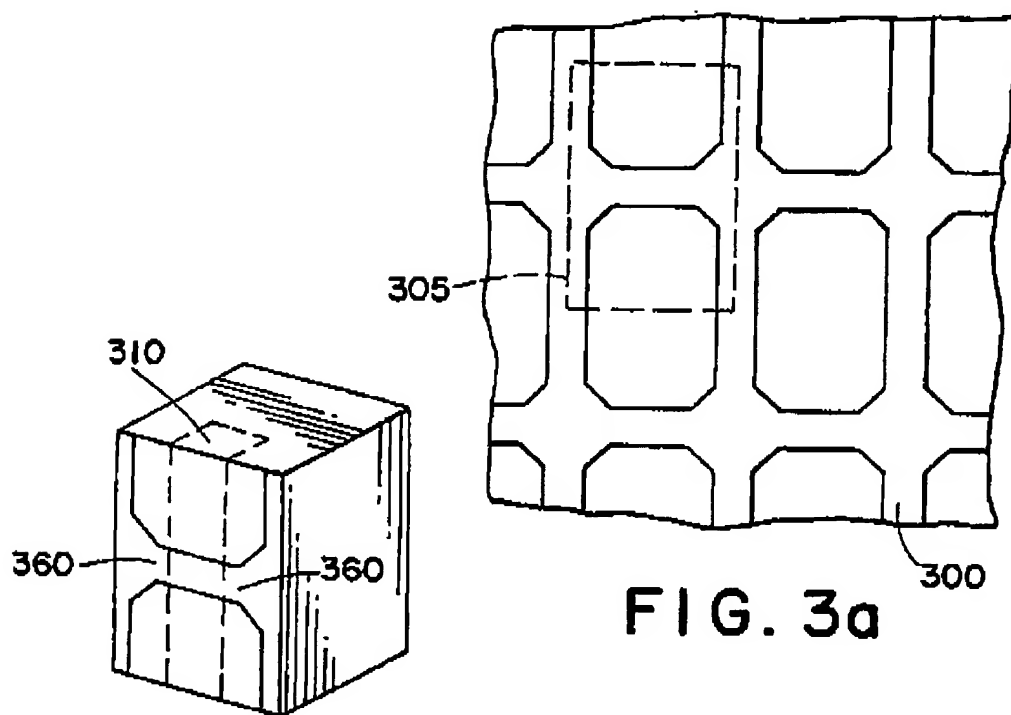


FIG. 3a

FIG. 3b

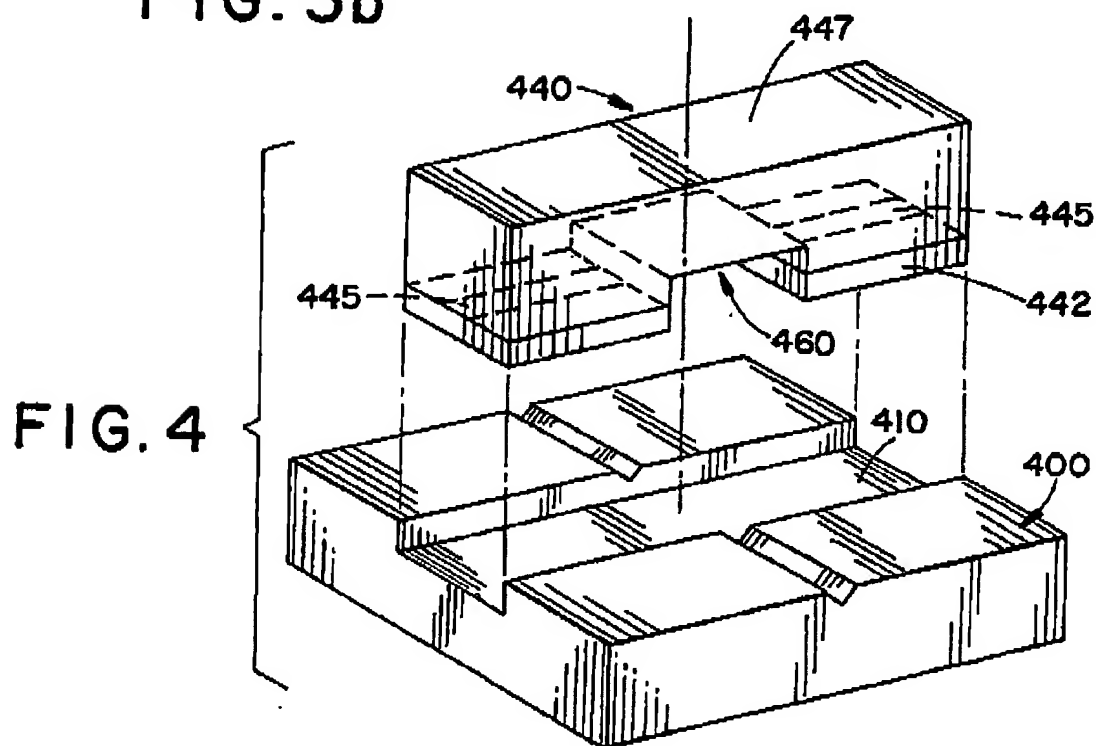


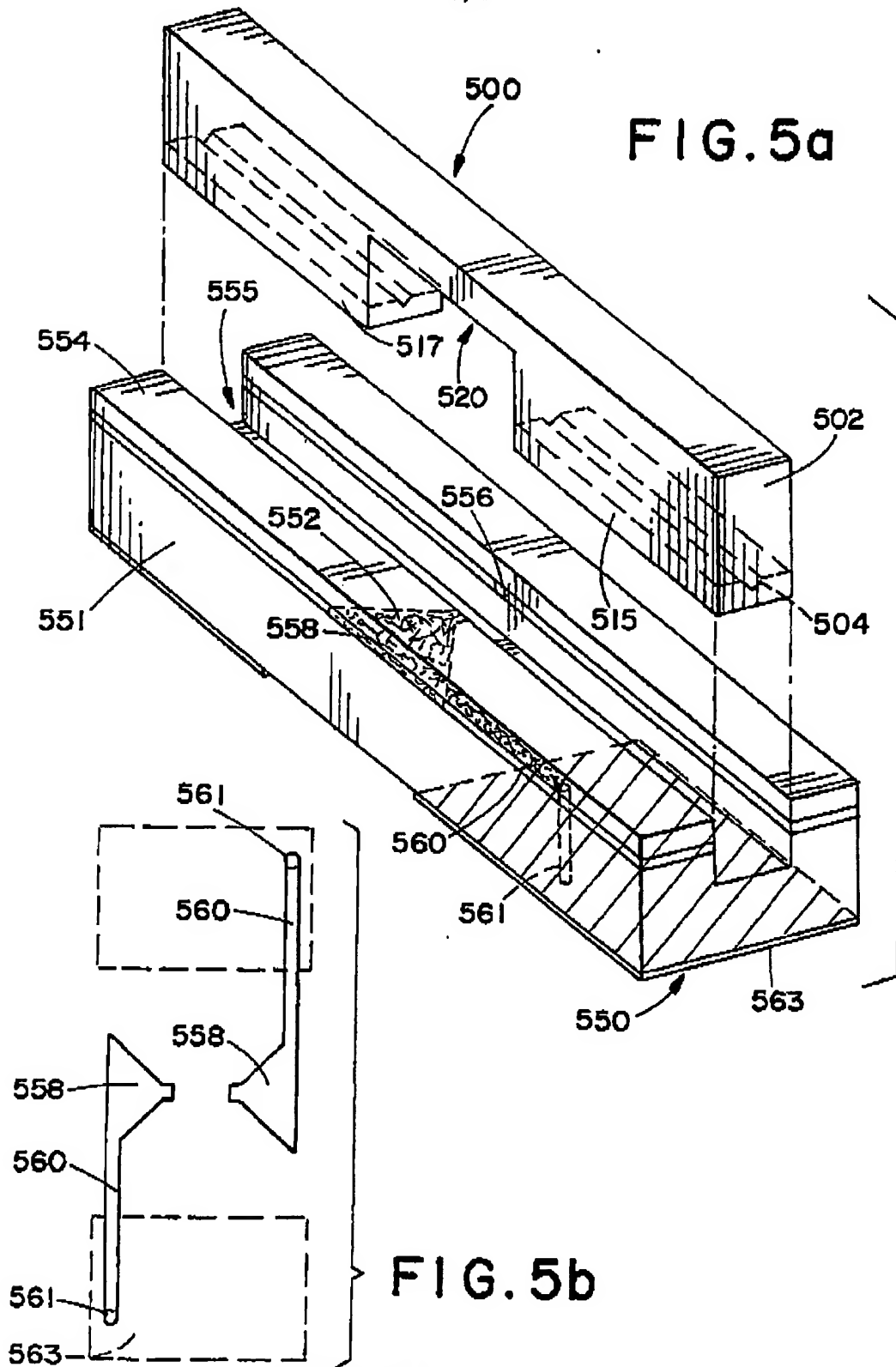
FIG. 4

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WO 96/05526

PCT/CA95/00474

3/6



SUBSTITUTE SHEET (RULE 26)

WO 96/05526

PCT/CA95/00474

4/6

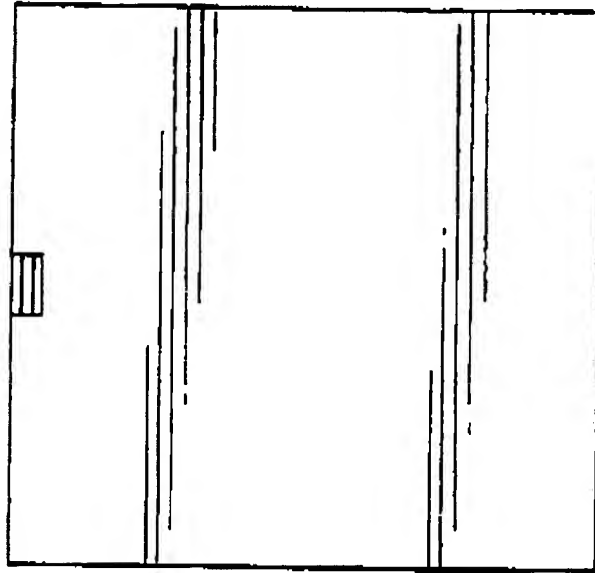


FIG. 5c

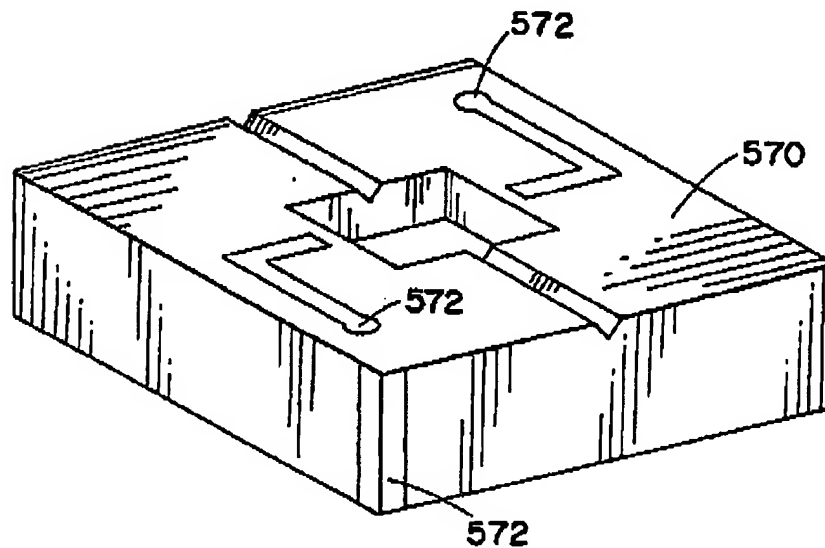


FIG. 5d

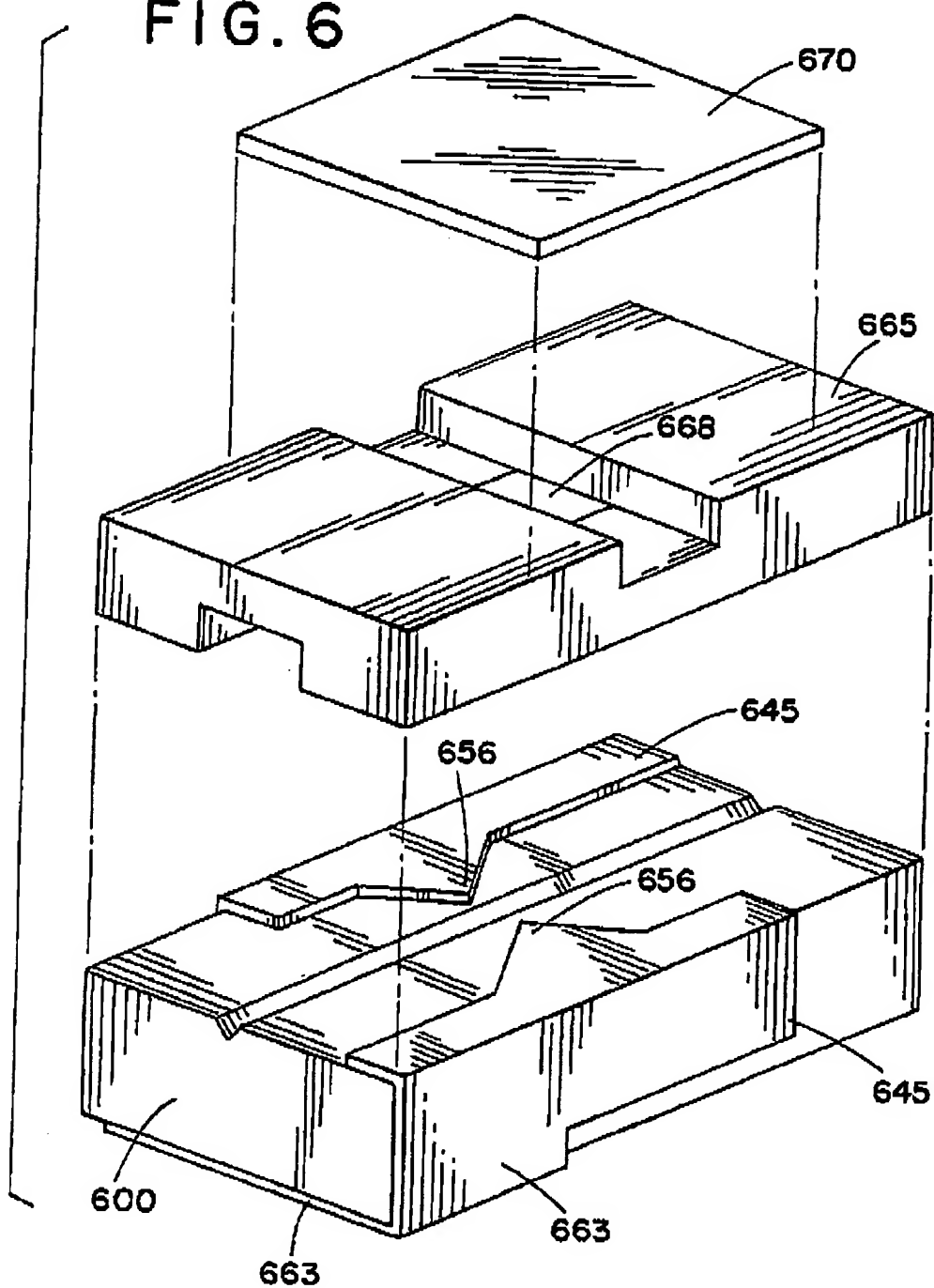
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WO 96/85526

PCT/CA95/00474

5/6

FIG. 6



SUBSTITUTE SHEET (RULE 26)

WO 96/05526

PCT/CA95/00474

6/6

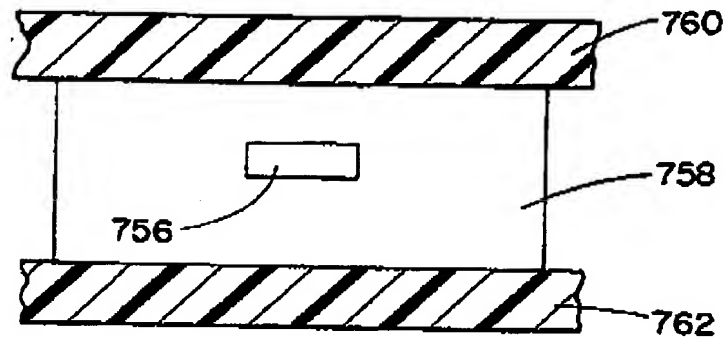


FIG. 7a

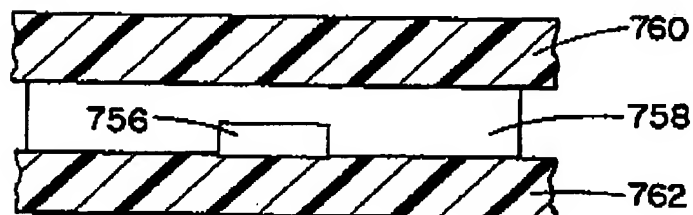


FIG. 7b

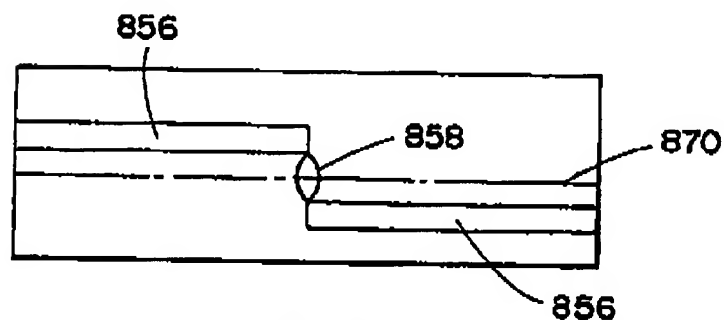


FIG. 8a

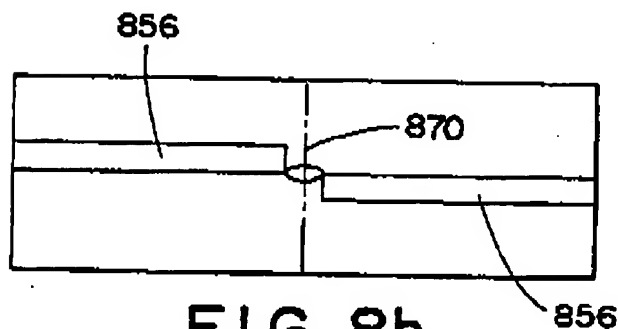


FIG. 8b

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International Application No.

PCT/CA 95/00474

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER
IPC 6 G02B6/255

According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

B. FIELDS SEARCHEDMinimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)
IPC 6 G02B

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched

Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practical, search terms used)

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category *	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
A	DE,A,28 46 777 (E. HANDRICK) 8 May 1980 see page 7 see figure 1 ---	1, 12, 15
A	US,A,4 958 905 (TYNES) 25 September 1990 see column 4, line 38 - line 48 see figure 3 ---	1, 12, 15
A	EP,A,0 458 609 (BICC) 27 November 1991 see column 3, line 7 - line 32 see figure 1 -----	1, 12, 15

☐ Further documents are listed in the continuation of box C.☒ Patent family members are listed in annex.

* Special categories of cited documents:

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Date of the actual completion of the international search

2 November 1995

Date of mailing of the international search report

10. 11. 95

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Luck, W

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INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

Information on patent family members

Int. Patent Application No

PCT/CA 95/00474

Patent document cited in search report	Publication date	Patent family member(s)	Publication date
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Form PCT/ISA/210 (patent family annex) (July 1993)